

# Baltics + Z = F.S.R.

WASHINGTON

**T**o their credit, the unreconstructed roundheels of The New York Times editorial pages gave extended space recently to an anonymous hard-line analysis, signed "Z," that has caused a fearsome fluttering in the dovecotes.

Z argues that Mr. Gorbachev's announced plan for reforming the Communist system while retaining central control is hopeless; consequently, whatever the West does to help him postpone the day of free markets and a multiparty system only prolongs the agony of the exit from Communism.

Keep the pressure on, is Z's import; economic desperation causes political movement. I would add that our State Department mantra of "stability," its go-slow admonitions to radicals and Mr. Bush's unstinting offer of economic aid to Moscow — untied to systemic change — help only those roll-with-the-punch totalitarians who will cling to as much power as they can.

My Times colleagues' response: Since Gorbachev's rise, "hard-liners have strained to find new rationales for old cold war animosities." Ad whominem? At me and him. Psycho-hangups aside, we hard-liners are said to "duck the critical fact that the likely alternatives to Mr. Gorbachev would be far worse for Western interests."

Revivified accommodationists, so

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## An equation to explain Gorby's multiparty flip-flop.

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Wrong. To soft-liners, arms control means a hurry-up strategic missile treaty, which would save the Russians vast sums while retaining their superpower threat; to hard-liners, arms control means first getting Soviet troops and tanks out of Eastern Europe, so that an end to occupation is not linked to Mr. Gorbachev's shaky personal fortunes.

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I have a large Bernese Mountain dog who bounds in out of the snow to lie on her back, paws splayed in every direction, in hopes of getting her belly scratched. This is the current State Department position on Baltic independence.

For 50 years, the U.S. has refused to acknowledge the Hitler-Stalin deal that forced Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into becoming "Soviet Socialist Republics." Nine U.S. Presidents have supported their independence-asserting legations in Washington.

With freedom now imminent, the Balts hear our State Department spokesman say their status is a Soviet "internal matter." Why couldn't we cut the hand-wringing and say instead:

"The United States reasserts its longstanding recognition of Baltic independence. We applaud the peaceful but resolute way the Baltic peoples have recently demonstrated their desire for freedom.

"As these three countries gain their freedom in fact, we are prepared to join with the Soviet Union and European nations to create a Baltic Convertible Currency Zone. We will encourage a private economy capable of replacing the command system, speeding the day of a convertible ruble and the opening of Soviet markets."

Such a targeted approach is a far cry from the tell-us-what-you-want, we-won't-rock-your-boat offer of trade by the eager Mr. Bush at Malta. One way requires genuine change; the other permits cosmetic change.

Here's the beauty part: Centrifugal agitation is now causing Mr. Gorbachev to rethink his insistence on one-party monopoly. He doesn't need tacit understanding from freedom-seekers; he needs a shove. Only then can he continue to play the man in the middle.

That's why some hard-liners here for the past year have been focusing on the Baltic states as the testing ground for real Soviet change. The freeing of six states of the empire has been breathtaking, but Baltic unrest reaches across what Moscow considers its border.

Mr. Gorbachev went to Lithuania to act against his words: in wagging a finger against inevitable separatism, he plunged ahead to "I see no tragedy in a multiparty system."

What brought about this high-wire flip-flop on the essence of one-party control — gentle accommodation by the Balts? Just the opposite.

Only unrelenting pressure from inside and out, accompanied by Red Army refusal to back political power with firepower, can change the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics into a less militarist F.S.R. — a Federation of Soviet Republics. While soft-liners are struck dumb with delight, hard-liners will keep pressing. □